

**T A B**

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## Design Statement

The annual, distinctive print issue of *Tab: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics* engages the reader with poetry as a material object and asks the reader to negotiate between image and text. The design does not assume a traditional role of quietly framing content; instead, design actively shapes the reading experience and continues to experiment with and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

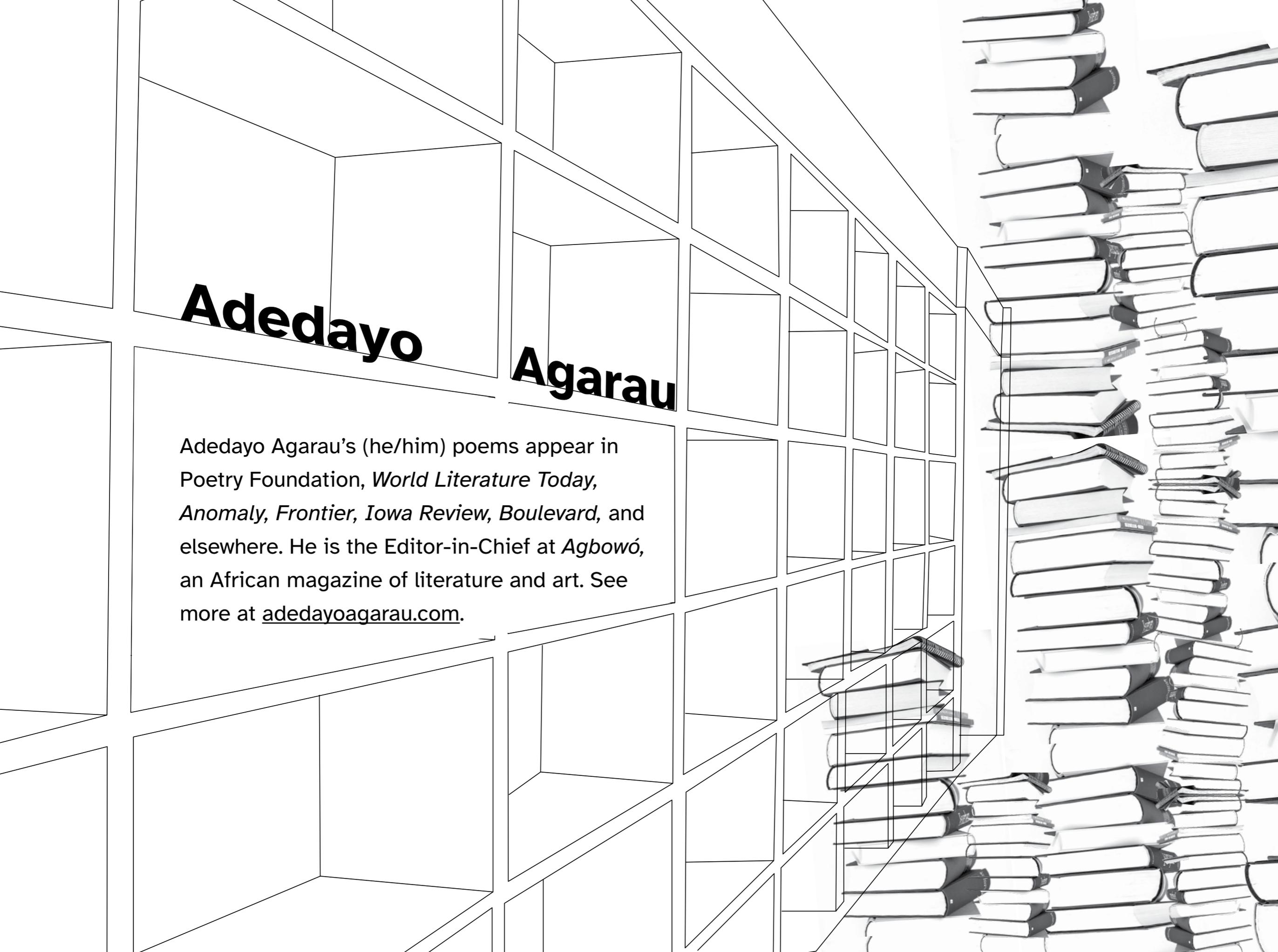
This 2023 volume is *Tab Journal's* eleventh year, and its print issue draws from traditions of how reading materials are made available to readers. Certainly, text is contained in objects such as books, journals, newspapers—with their scale, weight, and page-turning demands. These objects take on their weight based on cover material, size of page, binding, and ink. A single volume of *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (2nd Edition)* weighs 14.8 pounds and comes with its own magnifying glass.

And how are such objects themselves contained? The shelves where books and journals are stored are exclusive to people who can reach, grab, unstack, and navigate codex systems, all within the rooms and buildings that shelves—and readers—occupy. Henry Petroski writes in *The Book on the Bookshelf*, “Books and bookshelves are a technological system, each component of which influences how we view the other. Since we interact with books and bookshelves, we too become part of the system. This alters our view of it and its components and influences our very interaction with it.”

In Volume 11, *Tab Journal* questions access in relation to interaction and portability. With digital and audio formats of reading material, what is the place for print? *Tab Journal* strives for flexibility in a physical interaction yet defies the traditional anatomy of a codex—a spine, page signatures, an obvious cover. It is not waiting to be chosen from a shelf. Instead, the print issue

takes its storage with it in a form of a pouch where other things can join in its container, just as a phone or tablet is a portable container for poetry and much more.

To request one or more copies of the print issue, please use the Contact form on the *Tab Journal* website [TabJournal.org](http://TabJournal.org).



# Adedayo

# Agarau

Adedayo Agarau's (he/him) poems appear in Poetry Foundation, *World Literature Today*, *Anomaly*, *Frontier*, *Iowa Review*, *Boulevard*, and elsewhere. He is the Editor-in-Chief at *Agbowó*, an African magazine of literature and art. See more at [adedayoagarau.com](http://adedayoagarau.com).

## Wishbone

The entrance of light steered into the room gathers in it a cavity of dust,  
they sit, all of them, before the photographer—who is adjusting aperture, the neck of focus—  
a woman/the mother, in a yellow dry lace & orange damask *gele*, is at the epicenter  
her husband, someone's father, drizzles a smile upon the field of his face; he holds the  
woman/his wife & they hold their children—one of them is a boy in whose eyes  
a rainbow is knifed into a slice of lemon, in whose body is a masquerade dancing dust into  
years of memory. The camera shutters the man out, his dress, purple in the first take, ashes.  
The woman occupies the space that he leaves, & the children sit beside their mother/the woman.  
Now, the boy starts a song, fills his mouth with a stash of feathers, briefly lending his throat  
the audacity of gratitude; the ash remains of what the fire left when it caught the man/the father  
out of the photo. The light takes itself out & in the loom of darkness, someone's child is  
calling for help, & someone's mother is clutching space in search of her children. A requiem  
begins  
from the leg of a girl/the mother's daughter/the boy's sister who morphs into a stone &  
from her wrist, a bouquet emerges, & in that darkness that has fallen upon the stage, we could  
hear the grief

loud as the thud of a bird, its wishbone broken into tiny stars splattered across a hazy sky  
on the night the field of millet catches fire, on the night *esu laalu ogirioko* harvests with flames in  
his mouth.

I have watched this play over & over, pulled the wishbone out of the bones of wish & said  
*I want my father to be here to see that darkness is fetched by the disappearance of light.* I have  
tendered

mercies towards the door & forgiven the knob's twist, I have forgiven the photos & the  
memories of still, the evening baked in silence & the gatherers of grief. I have forgiven deities

& mothers whose hands are soaked in my sister's blood, whose teeth are stuck in her neck,  
I have forgiven the shadow of darkness & the hills of bones. The bird is always falling.

Out of the sky. I wake from the dream where my father kneels before the gods of doors.  
Before the windowsill & the effigies of parting, the dried bones of my sister's absence ache.



**Carolyn**

**Oliver**

Carolyn Oliver (she/her) is the author of *Inside the Storm I Want to Touch the Tremble*, winner of the Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry and published by University of Utah Press. See more at [carolynoliver.net](http://carolynoliver.net).

## **Celestial Bodies**

In another life I'm a hagiologist, eyes wrecked  
by years of resurrecting the venerable dead

from faded incunabula and low light. I leave  
the library late afternoon, hours before bats surf

vaulted arches and plunge over marble balustrades,  
welcome to feast on the small destroyers of history.

I drift west for a glass of vinho verde never cold  
enough to satisfy. The sense of your hand is a hoax

on my neck, where once you named four freckles  
after the evangelists, a gospel constellation.

Knuckle to knuckle, we fed each other almonds laced  
with rosemary, first-night fragrance lingering

as I asked how you became a maker of saints.  
Tonight we'll convene in bed again, trade vitae.

Exhausted in your arms once more I'll miss the Perseids,  
tears of St. Lawrence shed from August stars.

Last time we met, kneeling before the residue  
of the griddled martyr, you saw the bloodflakes  
  
in the ampulla turn wet. *Wept. I've never believed  
in the incorruption of the flesh,* you whispered later,  
  
against my breasts. Now in this bare chapel I sweat  
in stillness, recall your recessional kiss,  
  
soft as grapefruit pith and almost as bitter.  
The water's tepid in the font, my impulse sharp  
  
as turpentine: I want to smash this basin  
as if it held the last rainwater in a city besieged  
  
by drought, as if I could uncloak time to witness  
an ancient nun with your cypress eyes sprint to miracle  
  
the mosaic ruin whole and filled again, give  
the last of her breath to slake a sinner's fragile thirst.  
  
If I made an offering of this desire, called it vision,  
would you avert your gaze, you the postulator intimate

with virtue, the kinds of suffering holiness requires?  
No, my confessor, you wouldn't turn away.

You would slip my glasses off, sigh a benediction  
from your blurred lips: *Blessèd be the meteors,*

*who spend themselves to sanctify the night.*

You know why I haunt ghosts, unearth their wild

devotion. You and I are marginalia shadowed  
by a careless hand, we are gall-soaked vellum

invisible appetites consume.

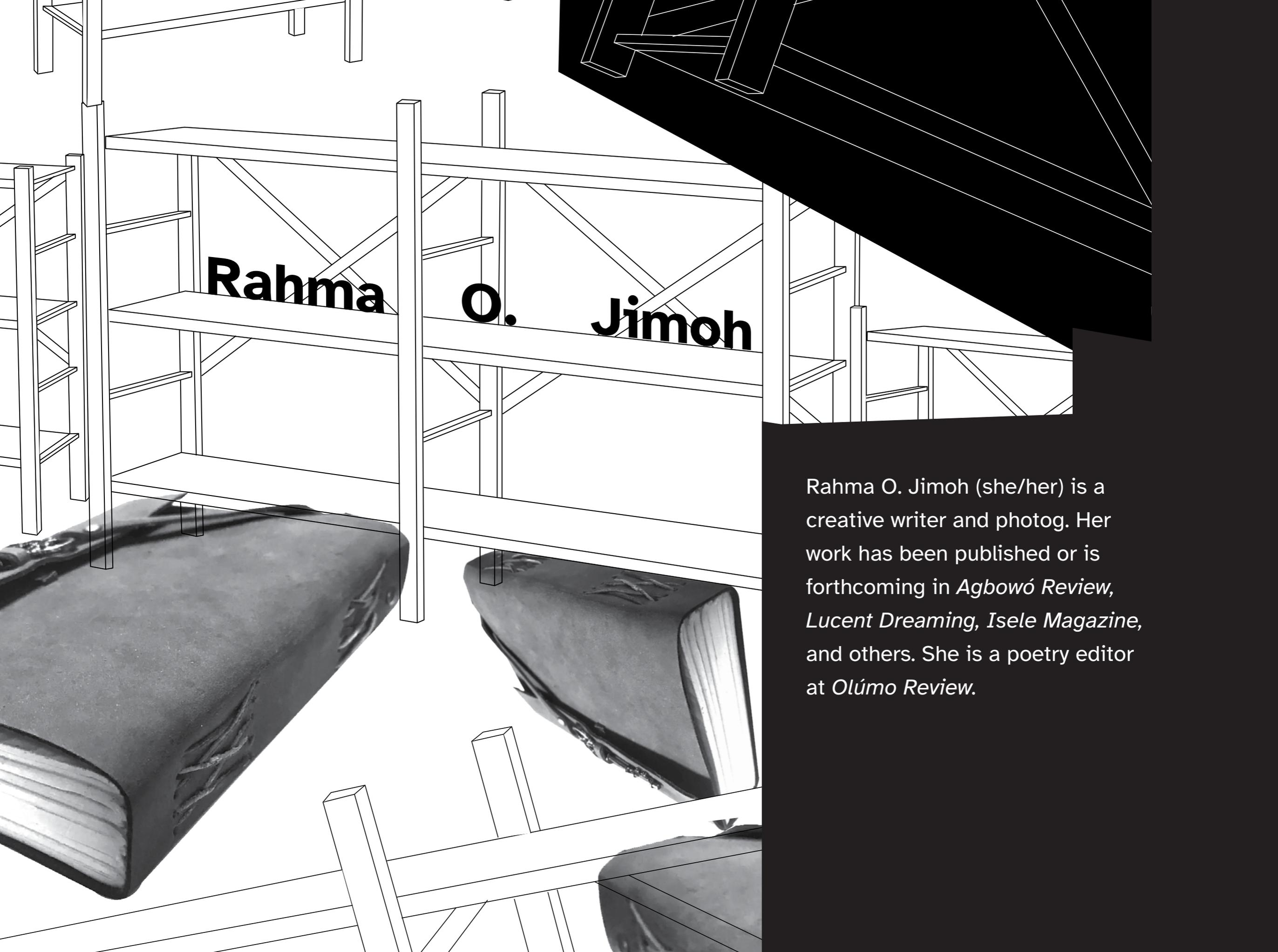
Nightfall. I buy almonds, wine, paper roses,

grapefruit and gold sugar for the morning. Even now  
serene in your greenest dress you expect me

as bats pulse the gloom for water. I feel the air bend  
under the strange weight of their bodies. Unseen too

I watch you drink the wakes of light that slice the sky  
then the dark swells over each wound as I come for you,

praying you will let me taste the relics of the saint  
some other of my kind will believe in.



**Rahma O. Jimoh**

Rahma O. Jimoh (she/her) is a creative writer and photog. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Agbowó Review*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Isele Magazine*, and others. She is a poetry editor at *Olúmo Review*.

## Landmine

My brother surfs on his iPhone as  
the police halt our bus.

I signal to him but his mind wanders  
on the net. I nudge his shoulders

& he shivers back to the bus.  
I fear their eyes will pop to name him.

I'm used to this. My brother is not.  
I've learned the road gimmicks like

Lasswell's theory of communication.  
My eyes have seen things my tongue

locks in the bowels of my stomach  
for what name do you give a country

that claws its youth by the neck?  
Once, they dragged a boy by his ears

& handcuffed him for wearing locs.  
His freedom was imprisoned, until

money grew wings for his release.

I want to teach my brother how

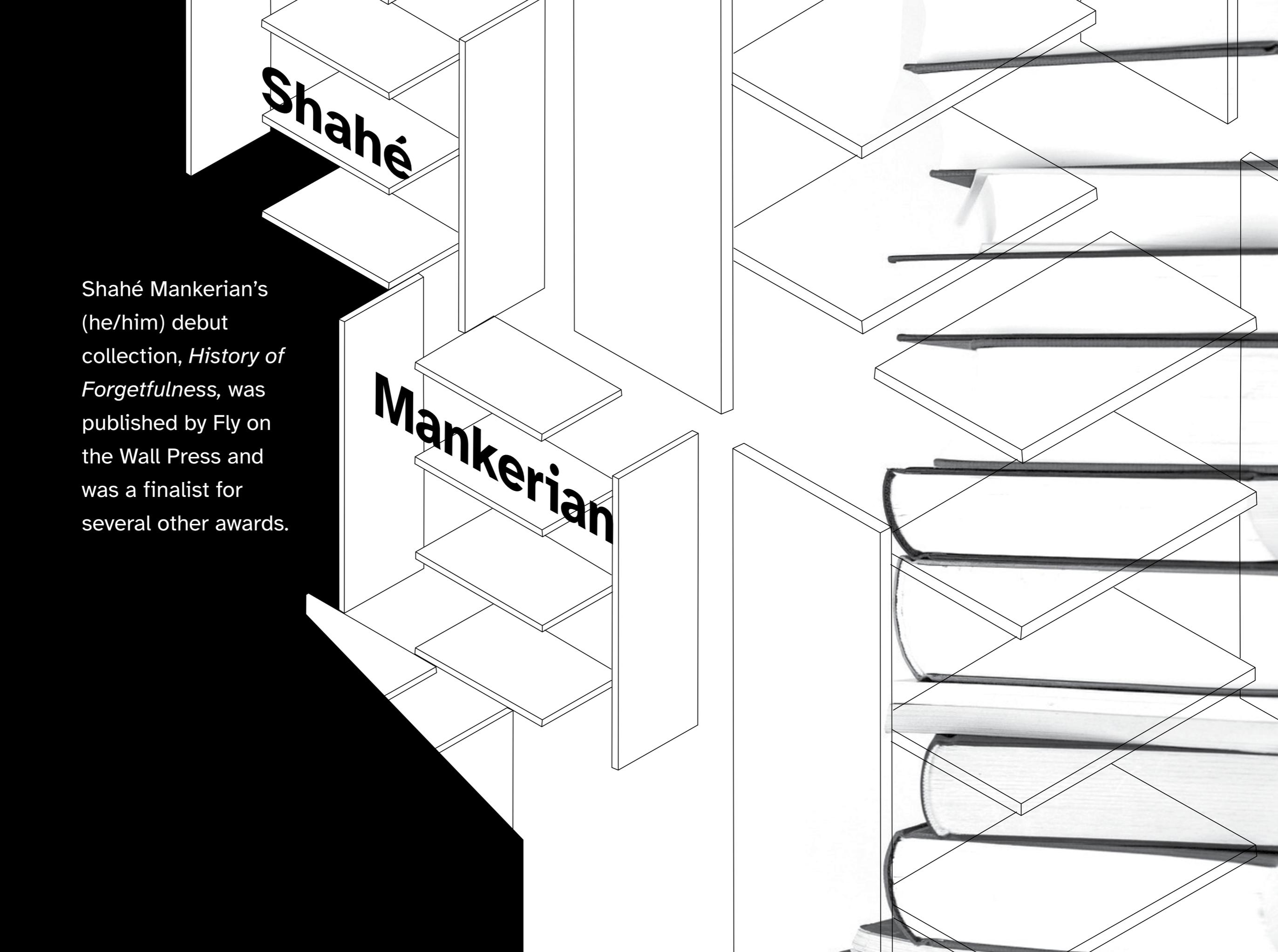
the cries of October 2020 dissipated  
like sheer smoke into the blue sky;

when a youth goes missing here:  
he has fallen headlong into a snag,

handcuffed to be led into a Black Maria  
to waste away in Nigeria's Golgotha.

What is the future shape of our country  
—a landmine that takes joy

in playing with the ashes of its youths?



**Shahé**

Shahé Mankерian's (he/him) debut collection, *History of Forgetfulness*, was published by Fly on the Wall Press and was a finalist for several other awards.

**Mankерian**

## Khachaturian in Beirut

On my 6th birthday, Father clenched an imaginary sword and marched around the living room to the rapid beats of the *Sabre Dance*.

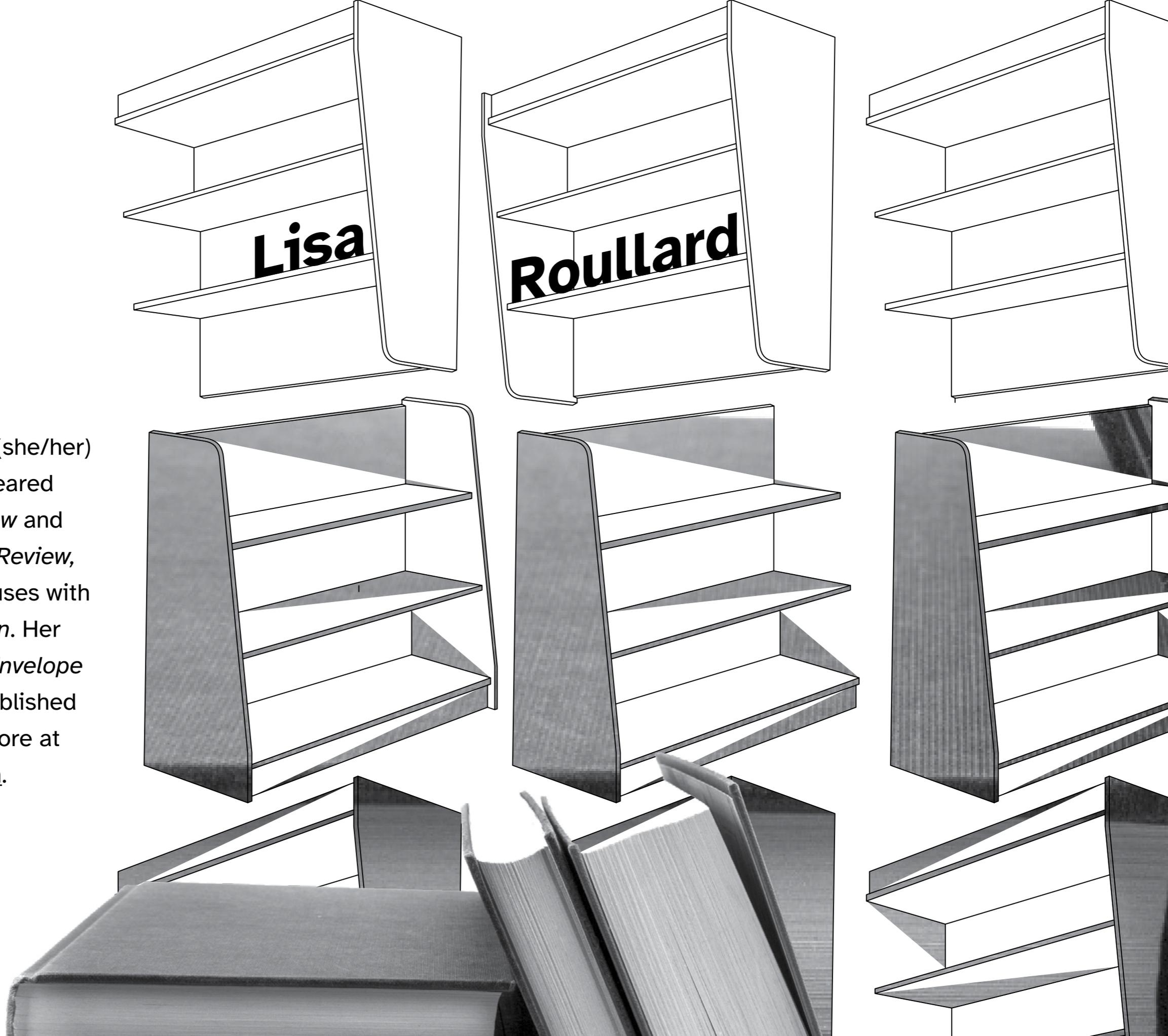
Outside, the Lebanese Civil War raged as tanks smashed through abandoned cars. Inside, Father jumped on the lopsided sofa

and shouted, "Son, this is Aram Khachaturian! The greatest living composer from Armenia." Dead bodies bloated below our balcony,

but I fancied Khachaturian in a cape, a red plume on the helmet, and a magical shield that protected children from wayward bullets.

Father raised the volume of the turntable right before the staccato of xylophones silenced the screaming hostage in the nearby alley.

Lisa Roullard's (she/her) poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review* and *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, as well as on buses with *Poetry in Motion*. Her chapbook, *An Envelope Waiting*, was published in 2020. See more at [lisaroullard.com](http://lisaroullard.com).



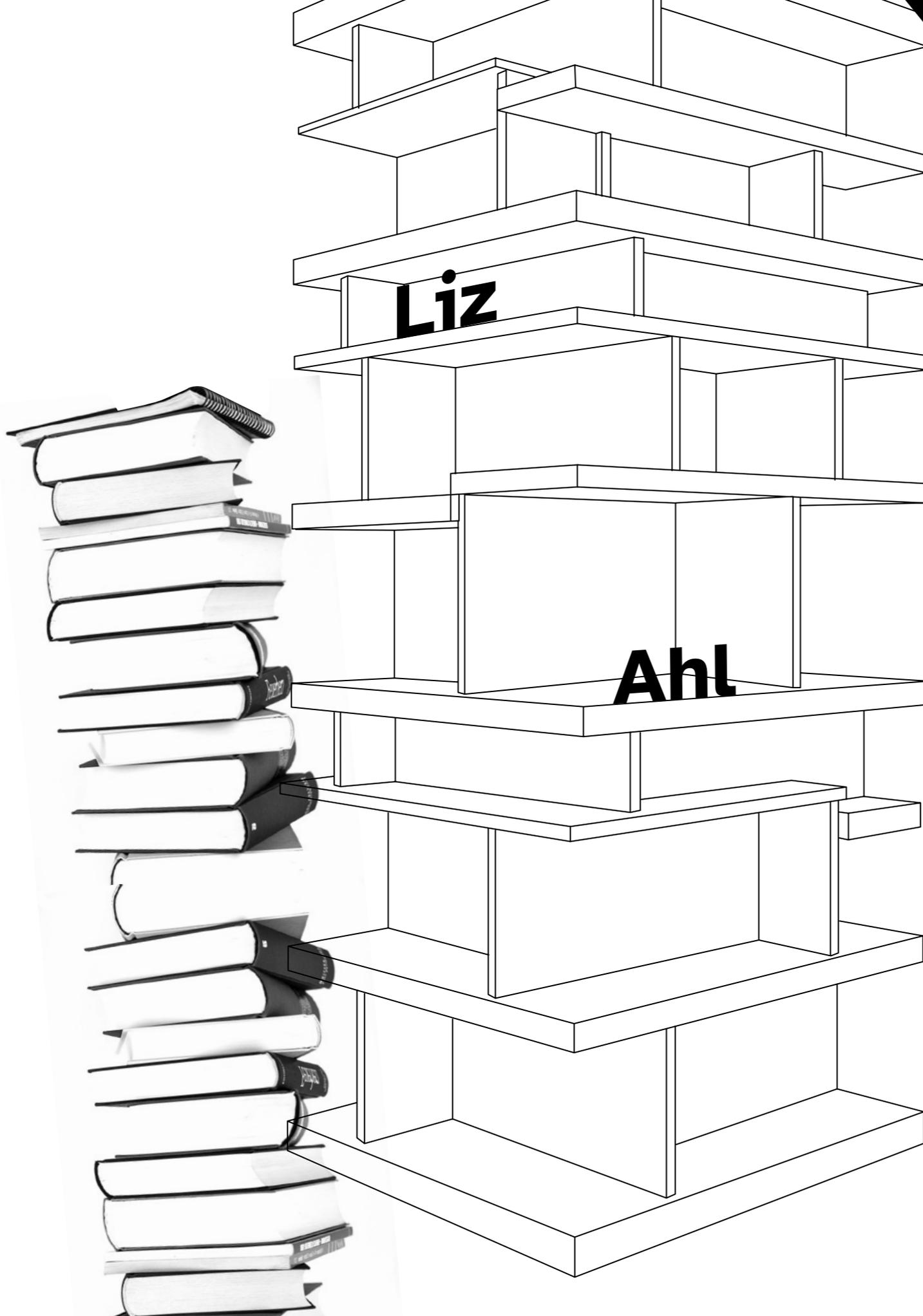
## **fugitive: crossword clues**

*across*

1. it's become peaceful
2. the crossing of land
3. the red laces making xs over each boot
4. not a crossing out
5. but the ways i've meandered
6. backtracked    retraced
7. those laces double knotted
8. keeping me
9. slip free

*down*

1. this is when i sit    when i rest    sleep    eat
2. when i'm *there*
3. shaped like an armchair
4. life as pastime    perhaps
5. i relish    what's exact    what fits
6. in my pockets    my palm    my pack
7. each new evening
8. i watch night craft the sky
9. black with squares
10. soon the stars will work their words
11. letter by letter in light

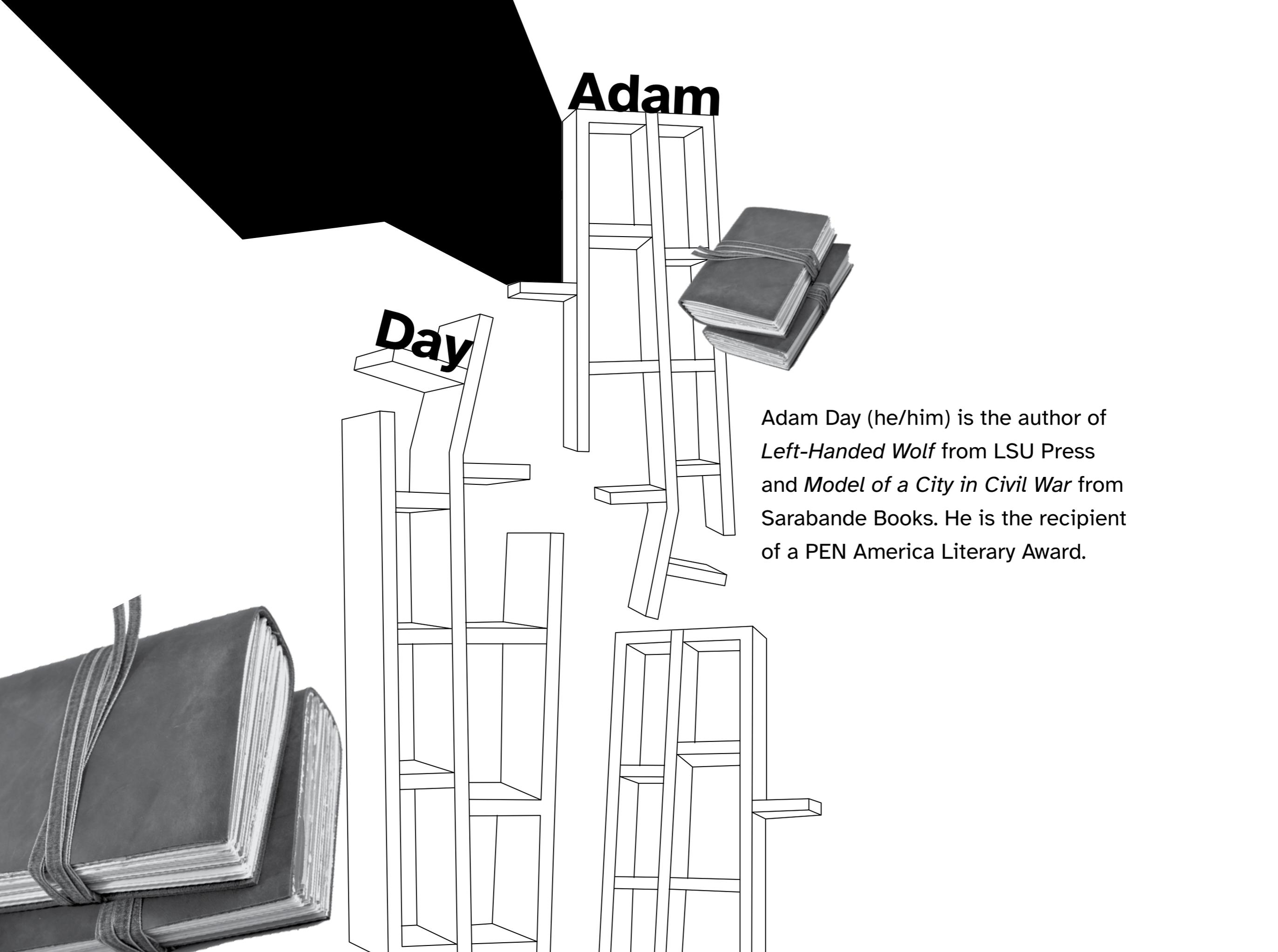


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## What Can Be Done

In the deep crook of night, you wake  
with a sudden, sharp leg cramp,  
and say my name, and say  
*leg cramp leg cramp leg cramp*  
and I'm just up from the deep,  
but *oh oh I know I know oh no*  
I know that shock of knife blade  
slicing through calf. You whimper  
and I listen, and it's mostly not words,  
but definitely language, and I don't  
remember which drifts away first—  
your expressions of pain, or me,  
back into sleep. The next morning,  
you apologize, say you knew  
even in the grip of it there was nothing  
I could do, but maybe you knew  
there actually was a thing I could do—  
wake, murmur long vowels in crude harmony,  
touch your body briefly, witness  
the pain that comes to both of us

more and more frequently, at night  
or midday, in joints and muscles,  
or the pains of fear and worry  
we must also sometimes show  
to one another, even when it seems  
there's nothing to be done.



**Adam**

**Day**

Adam Day (he/him) is the author of *Left-Handed Wolf* from LSU Press and *Model of a City in Civil War* from Sarabande Books. He is the recipient of a PEN America Literary Award.

## **To Be There**

Head of the bay,  
starfish pry mussels

from rocks, enveloped  
by the star's extruded

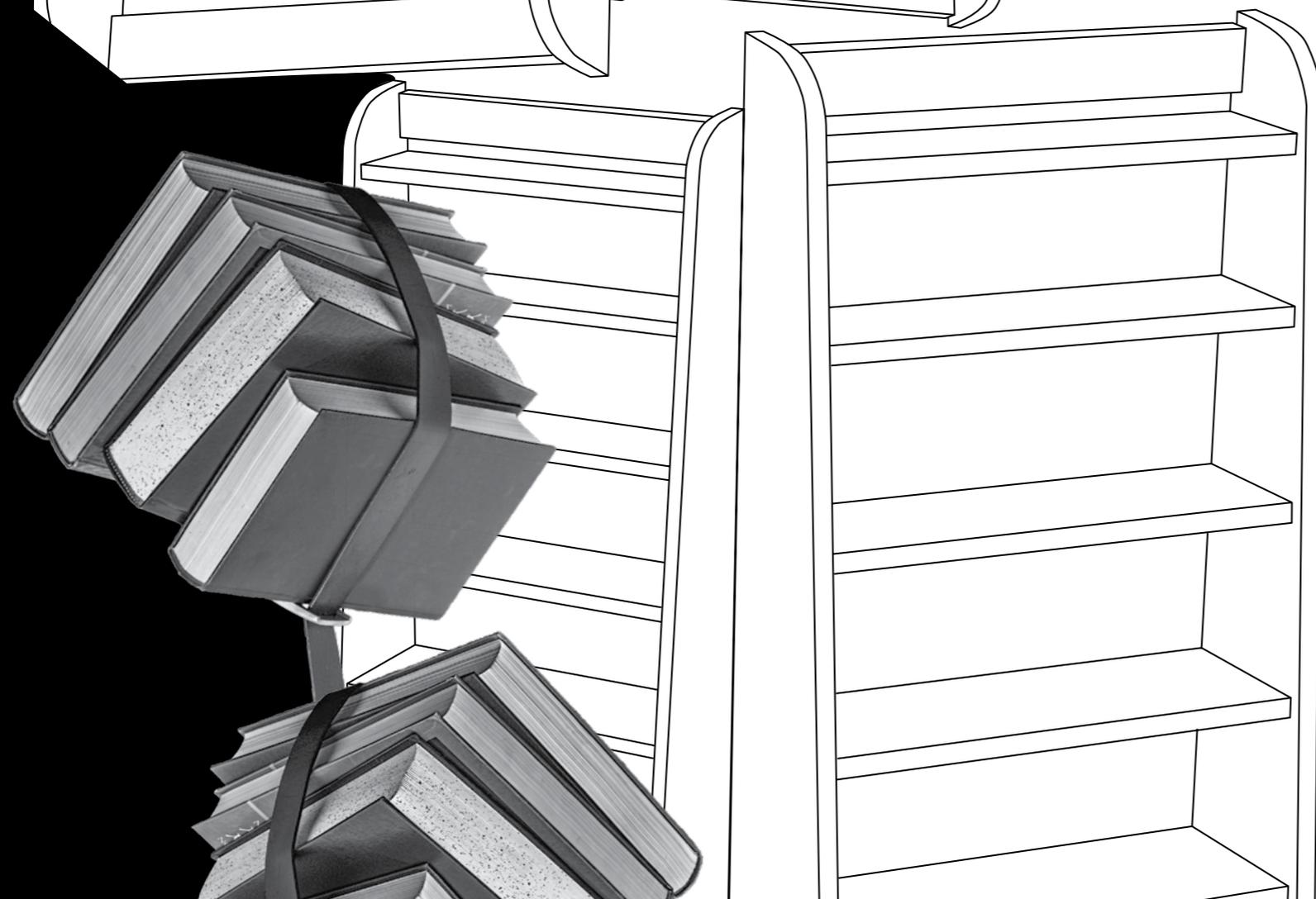
stomach. One crab  
tears a leg from another.

Goat-eyed reef octopus  
comes for the crab

at the head of the bay  
near a rock shelf's

wedged body; her face  
flashing teeth when

the seaweed waves, pupils  
gone gray.



Blas Falconer's (he/him) latest book is *Forgive the Body This Failure* from Four Way Books. He teaches in the MFA program at San Diego State University and is a co-editor at *Mentor and Muse: Essays from Poets to Poets*. See more at [blasfalconer.com](http://blasfalconer.com).

## A Theory of Happiness

I can't recall the name of the film  
or the actors, only that

they're driving along the coast  
in a convertible, the sea

behind them, that one will make  
a vow—for better or

for worse. *Will I be  
happy*, he asks,

guiding the car  
along the cliff's edge,

and the friend, who is  
somewhat older, says, *Yes*,

*you will be happy, but  
you will not know it.*